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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000241

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ECON ETRD MZ

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GUEBUEZA SACKS THREE MINISTERS, DEMOTES FOURTH

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Matthew Roth, Reasons 1.4(b)&(d)

¶11. (C) In a rare cabinet reshuffle on March 10, President Armando Guebuza sacked the Transportation, Justice, and Environment Ministers, and demoted Foreign Minister Alcinda Abreu to the less prestigious Environment Ministry. The three incoming ministers are considered to be capable technocrats. On balance, the moves are positive for USG interests, and may indicate that Guebuza recognizes that his government must make some changes to improve its performance in advance of scheduled elections for late 2009.

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Foreign Ministry  
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¶12. (C) The new Foreign Minister is Oldemiro Baloi, a former Minister of Trade and Industry under previous President Joaquim Chissano. He is a strong supporter of free trade and regional integration, and was the lone voice in favor of regional integration via SADC in the GRM's council of ministers in the 1990s. He has also served as the Vice Minister of Cooperation and as a National Director of Trade in the Commerce Ministry. He holds a degree in Economics from the University of London. Foreign Ministry and Commerce Ministry contacts have told Emboffs they are very pleased with Baloi's appointment, and believe it may portend a more active foreign policy for the GRM after years of drift under Abreu.

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Justice Ministry  
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¶13. (C) The incoming Justice Minister is Maria Benvinda Levi, previously director of the highly-praised legal and judicial training center of Mozambique, and a former presiding judge of the Maputo city court who is expert in family law. Levi worked closely with USAID on a project to improve the city court's efficiency in 1997-2001. The justice sector and former Minister Esperanca Machavela had increasingly come under criticism for slowness, inefficiency, and corruption in recent years.

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Transportation Ministry  
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¶14. (C) Paulo Zucula becomes the Transport and Communications Minister. He had been the director for the National Disaster Management Institute since December 2006, and had won high praise for his oversight of the GRM response to flood relief and evacuation in 2007 and 2008 events. He has a masters degree in agronomy from the University of Minnesota, supported with a USAID scholarship, and served as vice minister of agriculture in 1990-1992. Former Transportation Minister Antonio Mungwambe was roundly criticized for

bungling the GRM's poor implementation of a hike in bus fares in the country that ultimately led to violent rioting in Maputo.

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Environment Ministry  
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¶5. (C) Alcinda Abreu moves from the Foreign Ministry to the Environment Ministry. Her husband was the private secretary of Mozambique's first president, Samora Machel, and died with Machel in a plane crash in South Africa in 1986, and pundits believe this personal connection, along with her position as a member of the Frelimo Political commission kept her from losing a ministerial brief entirely. Abreu went to the United States in 1994 as an International Visitor in a program on the role of women in U.S. policy. Previous Environment Minister Luciano de Castro leaves among serious concerns about deforestation and illegal logging and fishing, especially in the central provinces.

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Comment: Change for Good  
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¶6. (C) By all accounts, it appears the U.S.-Mozambican bilateral dialogue will improve with Baloi at the foreign ministry, and the new justice and transportation ministers enjoy reputations as competent technocrats who have extensive positive exposure to the United States and the USG. By choosing three well-respected professionals instead of party apparatchiks personally loyal to his camp, President Guebuza may be sending the signal that he recognizes that his government suffers from a perception of incompetence and must

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move quickly in order strengthen his hand in the run-up to 2009 presidential elections.

Chapman